

COMMUNITY



Whitesbog's annual festival is back with berries, art and entertainment



PHOTOS BY SCOTT ANDERSON / FOR THE BCT

(File) Danetta Banach (left), of Eastampton, and Carol Cinoski, of Mount Laurel, try blueberry ice cream.

Summertime

BLUEBERRIES

By **LISA RYAN**
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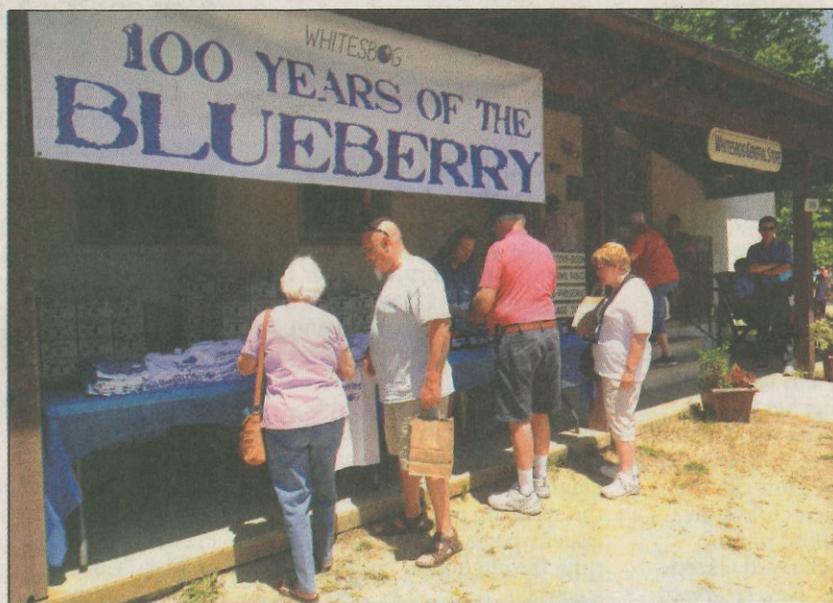
PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — Whitesbog Village's annual Blueberry Festival is back for its 34th year this weekend, but the fruit the event celebrates has been part of the area for much longer.

It was 102 years ago when Elizabeth C. White and botanist Frederick Coville successfully cultivated the first highbush blueberries.

Whitesbog Village began as a cranberry farm in the early 20th century, founded by White's father, Joseph. He hired migrant workers from the Philadelphia and Trenton areas to work his cranberry farm. Many of those workers lived in cottages in the village, which was founded in 1857.

The settlement is made up of those cottages, the village itself and 3,000 acres of cranberry bogs, blueberry fields, reservoirs, sugar sand roads and Pine Barrens forests, according to the Whitesbog Preservation Trust. The property, which is listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places, can be toured by wagon during this year's Blueberry Festival. On these excursions, participants will learn about Whitesbog's history.

Now part of the Brandon T. Byrne State Forest, Whitesbog produces fewer berries now than it once did. Even so, there are still plenty for visitors to pick during the festival on Saturday and Sunday. For those who prefer painting berries to picking them, that's possible



(File) Visitors shop for blueberry-themed items at last year's festival.

as well: This year, festivalgoers can help paint a mural of Whitesbog and some of its workers. The image, outlined for guests to fill in, depicts men loading blueberries into a truck and a woman standing by with a blueberry pie.

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., visitors also can partake of festival staples like blueberry pie, White Dot Dairy Bar ice cream and Brother Bear's Barbecue.

The event is meant to provide old-fashioned family fun, according to event coordinator Caroline Weigle.

"A lot of things today are about buying stuff and walking through the street," Weigle said. "As my son would say, 'That's not fun for the kids.'"

There will be free crafts and games for youngsters and their families, and a children's author will put on a show at 11 a.m. Sunday. Still, those who like to shop will have their pick of goods like wood carvings, art, jewelry and more from a projected 35-40 artisan crafters.

Those who are looking for something not offered in years past can try

If You Go

The 34th annual Whitesbog Blueberry Festival is at Whitesbog Village, 120 W. Whitesbog Road, Pemberton Township (for GPS, use 799 Lakehurst Road), Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. both days.

Car parking fee is \$10; bike parking fee is \$5. Some of the festival's attractions are free, while others (some tours, charges for items purchased) are charged separately.

their hand at contra dancing from 10 to 11 a.m. both days. The combination of country and square dancing is open to all ages and easy to pick up, Whitesbog archivist Albertine Senske said.

Weigle is particularly excited to introduce dancing to the festival, since she recalls seeing it at similar events as a child. She grew up attending the Blueberry Festival and has volunteered for about eight years. Although Weigle now organizes the array of vendors and craftspeople, her time spent leading tours on the history of Whitesbog influenced her perspective on the festival.

"I think my favorite part is actually taking people around and showing them the farm," she said. "(And) picking blueberries — because there's nothing better than a fresh blueberry — and the music."

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